DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 127 526 CG 010 754

TITLE	Summary of the Findings from a Study About Cigarette Smoking Among Teen-Age Girls and Young Women.
INSTITUTION	Yankelovitch, Skelly and White, Inc., New York, N.Y.
SPONS AGENCY	American Cancer Society, Inc., New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE	Feb 76
NOTE	18p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.83 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS	*Environmental Influences; *Females; Feminism; Motivation; Peer Relationship; *Personal Values; Research Projects; Self Control; *Smoking; *Social Attitudes; *Teenagers
IDENTIFIERS	*American Cancer Society

ABSTRACT

This paper presents the major results of a study for the American Cancer Society on cigarette smoking among teen-age girls and young women, and findings relevant to the prevention and quitting of smoking. The four major trends found in this study are: (1) a dramatic increase in cigarette smoking among females; (2) an intellectual awareness of the dangers of smoking; (3) belief in an all-pervasive smoking environment; and (4) growth and acceptance of the "New Values" generated by college students of the 1960's. In its efforts to break down the myth of an extensive smoking society and to utilize the positive elements of the "New Values," the study presents the following list of findings which can be used in an antismoking campaign: (1) Teen-age smokers are more sophisticated than nonsmokers; (2) Smoking is not identified with rebelliousness; (3) Peer relationships are a dominant factor in smoking; (4) Antismoking education needs to begin at an earlier grade level than supposed; (4) Young women smokers express a high need for independence; (5) Working women smoke less than housewives; (6) Identification with the women's movement does not encourage smoking; (7) Pregnancy only causes a cutback in smoking; (8) Children are less militant than formerly in their efforts to curb smoking among their parents; and (9) Light smokers can quit more easily than heavy smokers. The study indicates there is a definite potential for getting females to quit, but more emphasis must be placed on the nonaddictive qualities of smoking in antismoking campaigns. (HLM)

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SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

From a Study About Cigarette Smoking
Among Teen-age Girls and Young Women

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Conducted for
The American Cancer Society
By Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc.

February, 1976

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SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

Four major trends dominate this study of cigarette smoking among teen-age girls (ages 13 to 17) and young women (18 to 35 years of age). The results are based on in-depth interviews with a total of 826 teen-agers and young women, screened on the basis of their smoking patterns from a national probability sample of 3,000 households.

1. The Increase in Smoking: There is a dramatic increase in the number of young teen-age girls smoking cigarettes compared to just a few years ago. An American Cancer Society study conducted in 1969 indicated that 22% of all teen-age girls smoked cigarettes. Now the percentage is 27%. Translated into people, this 5% increase means that half a million more teen-age girls are smoking currently -- some occasionally, many others more regularly. The increase in heavy smokers among teen-age girls is equally significant. The 1969 study showed that 10% of all teen-aged girl smokers smoked a pack a more a day. Now, four out of ten teen-age girl smokers are smoking at least one pack of cigarettes daily.

The scene among young women is somewhat different - but also alarming. For while smoking incidence has shown only a slight shift (34% in 1965; 36% now), the proportion of heavy smokers -- really heavy smokers -- has accelerated sharply. According to the U.S. Health Survey conducted in 1965, one out of two young women smokers (51%) were smoking a pack or more of cigarettes a day. Now the figure is 61%, with the sharpest increase among the percentage of smokers smoking more than a pack a day (9% in 1965; 25% now).

2. The Antismoking Message Has Been Heard: This increase in the numbers and intensity of cigarette smoking has occurred at a time when teen-age girls and young women at least intellectually continue to be fully aware of the hazards of smoking. For a majority of the group, the message has come through loud and clear:

.... Smoking is as harmful for women as for men (74% teen-age girls; 80% young women).

.... Smoking is harmful for young people as well as for older people (71% teen-age girls; 71% young women).

.... It is not safe to smoke low tar cigarettes (56% teen-age girls; 54% young women).

.... Smoking during pregnancy can harm the fetus (56% teen-age girls; 62% young women).

Among young smokers, 56% of the teen-age girls and 62% of the young women believe wholly or in part that smoking is as addictive as illegal drugs. Yet, they still smoke and start to smoke in greater numbers and with more frequency than in the past. The question is why? Two trends help to explain the reasons:

3. The All Pervasive Smoking Environment: On the one hand, teen-age girls and young women smokers continue to be aware of the antismoking message -- but the situation all around them and their own perceptions of who and how many people smoke more than counterbalances the impact of what they have seen, heard or read about the dangers of smoking.

For example, among teen-age girl smokers:

.... 82% of all teen-age girls think of teen-agers as smokers rather than nonsmokers.

.... Two out of three believe that more women are smoking now than a few years ago.

.... 72% of the girls with boyfriends report that their fellows are smokers.

.... 66% say that half of their friends or more smoke.

.... 87% smoke with their parents' knowledge; 34% with their parents' approval.

.... 84% have fathers who smoke or smoked; 64%, mothers.

Add to this the fact that:

.... 49% of the teen-age girls who smoke report that their schools have special "smoker" rooms where it is permitted to light up during the school day.

.... And 68% of the teen-age girl smokers indicate that their own doctors have not warned them against smoking.

Operating against this all pervasive smoking environment, the one most dominant countervailing force -- awareness of antismoking teleivsion commercials, has been cut drastically as a result of the retrenchment of free matching time following the barring of cigarette advertising on television. In 1969, 87% reported that they had seen or heard an antismoking television commercial in the past four weeks. Currently, only 48% are exposed to this type of television spot. On the other hand, the kinds of people identified with cigarette advertising include the following: attractive, enjoying themselves, well dressed, sexy, young, and healthy.

4. Changing Values: Further bolstering the impressions of the all pervasive smoking environment and the increase in smoking itself is the growth and acceptance of the

"New Values" generated by college youth in the sixties, and now permeating the majority of all young people.[1/] The "New Values" represent the breakdown of previous moral norms and are characterized by the rejection of authority, emphasis on the emotional rather than the rational, freer sexual morality, strong accent on self and self-fulfillment, the acceptability of illegal drugs and a more informal life style.

The new youth values do not necessarily cause more young people to smoke -- but they make it easier to do what one wants to do and to resist arguments against doing it. Both the prevailing smoking environment and the changed value structure of young people raise major challenges for the American Cancer Society:

1. To break through the mythology of how everybody smokes with the real facts -- that cigarette smoking is a minority phenomena.
2. To utilize the more positive elements of the "New Values" -- the importance of self and self-fulfillment, the need to be an independent thinker, the importance of of physical wellbeing -- as strong barriers to smoking.

1/ See "The New Morality" by Daniel Yankelovich, McGraw-Hill Publishing Company, 1974.

Using young people's own immediate interests and satisfactions as the main leverage against smoking rather than the threat of future problems.

In analyzing the results of the study, we have paid special attention to those findings which appear to have the most direct bearing on curbing and preventing teen-age girls from smoking and encouraging young women to quit. These have included studying the psycho-social environment of the smokers and nonsmokers, the implications of the Women's Liberation Movement, the impact of antismoking education, pressures to smoke, motivations not to smoke, and the problems and potentials for quitting. All of this information is covered in detail in the full report. Here in capsulated form are some of the major highlights of the study:

The Profile of the Teen-age Girl Smoker:

The profile of the teen-age girl smoker counters the image of a socially ill-at-ease youngster turning to cigarettes as a means of being thought of as more sophisticated or as a needed prop for handling social situations. Instead, it is the teen-age girl smoker who is at ease socially, very put together, and with full

confidence in herself. Parties and social gatherings are her metier. One measure of both her sophistication and her value structure is the fact that 31% have already had sexual relations.

It is instead the nonsmoker who tends to be quieter, far less self-assured, more involved with athletics, school activities and clubs -- but more likely in her spare time to be reading or watching television.

Rebelliousness and Smoking:

Cigarette smoking among teenage girls, however, does appear to be highly identified with an antiauthority rebellious syndrome. Among teen-age girls who smoke 25% use marijuana regularly compared to 3% of the nonsmokers; 81% of the smokers drink and 32% drink at times to get drunk compared to 42% of the nonsmokers who drink or 4% who drink to get drunk. One out of four teenage girl smokers have run away from home compared to 10% of the nonsmokers. Despite the widespread acceptance of cigarettes, and the acknowledgement of smoking by parents and school authorities, the old "wood shed" image of cigarette smoking lingers on -- while the concept of not smoking as a symbol of nonconformity or rebellion against advertising, big business, society, has not yet caught on.

Teen-age Girl Smokers and Peer Relationships:

Peer relationships, long identified as a major factor in teen-age smoking, continue to operate as a dominant influence. Teen-age girl smokers flock together and have more respect for the opinions of their own peers than for authorities. There is, however, an opposite side to the story as well. For the current study indicates that all teen-age girl nonsmokers are not homogenous but rather divide into two almost equal groups. It is easy to explain why over half of the nonsmokers (55%) do not smoke -- for they are not influenced by the new values, but are very traditional in their views and outlook. They are strongly religious and respectful of authority -- and they shy away from their peers who smoke, use marijuana and are part of the new values. The other group of nonsmoking teen-agers are very different -- for they share many of the same values as the smokers -- and are highly exposed to the total smoking environment. We call them the "Vulnerables" for, on the surface, they appear to be ready candidates for the next wave of new smokers. One out of two of the "Vulnerables" report that half or more of their male friends smoke; a third indicate that most of the girl friends smoke. A majority have one or more parents who smoke. They see more women

smoking now than in the past. Yet they do not smoke. Instead they have found, consciously or unconsciously, some strong barriers to smoking. These are - the importance of being in control of one's own life; and emphasis on physical fitness and well-being; concern about the addictive nature of cigarettes, and perhaps most of all, by becoming militant antismokers - people who are angered by other smokers, upset by smoke filled rooms and ready for increased regulation of smoking. In other words, they are finding a cause -- and a new peer identification.

Teen-age Girls and Antismoking Education:

One out of two teen-age girls have attended antismoking programs -- 48% of the smokers; 49% of the nonsmokers. A large majority of the girls (84%) have found them meaningful -- including, however, 64% of the smokers. The problem is one of timing. Six out of ten smokers have started to smoke before they are thirteen years of age... but have attended smoking education classes or programs in the seventh, eighth, nineth or tenth grades of school, when it is already too late. Only 4% of all teen-age smokers attended an antismoking class, for example, by the time they were in the sixth grade (ages 12 and 13). The lateness of the

educational efforts is exacerbated by the fact that the teen-age girl who is likely to smoke can also be turned off by school -- especially once she reaches junior high. A third of all teen-age girl smokers report that they hate school -- compared to 16% of the nonsmokers. Almost an equal number (29%) have been suspended or expelled from school - compared to 4% of the nonsmokers. The teen-age girl smoker is apt to be a "C" or "D" student; the nonsmoker, an "A" or "B" student. The results of the study, thus, emphasize two major directions for antismoking education:

Give it earlier -- and concentrate more on peer sponsored antismoking campaigns in the higher grades.

Young Women Smokers:

Many of the same qualities which distinguish teen-age girl smokers from nonsmokers are also apparent -- but to a lesser degree -- between young women smokers and nonsmokers. The women smokers also tend to be more social and outgoing, antiauthority and strongly subjected to the total smoking environment and "peer" pressure. Over two thirds of all young women smokers (68%) have boy friends or husbands who

smoke compared to less than half (41%) of the nonsmokers. Their friends also smoke -- and they are somewhat more likely to have come from homes in which one or both of their parents smoked. Compared with their own nonsmoking peers, the young women smokers are readier to:

.... Have fun now and forget about the future (46% smokers; 36% nonsmokers).

.... Rationalize that everything you do these days seems to give you cancer (46% smokers; 32% nonsmokers).

.... Feel that there is too much regulation of people's lives (41% smokers; 32% nonsmokers).

Yet they also have one strong characteristic which could be used as an integral part of any antismoking effort -- 61% of the young women smokers express a strong need to be independent compared to 52% of their nonsmoking contemporaries.

Working Women:

Contrary to the theory that the increase in heavy smoking among young women is correlated with the greater numbers of women who are now employed, the findings of the study show that it is the housewives -- not the working women -- who are more likely to be the heavy smokers.

Among young women smokers, 39% are employed full or part time -- and 61% are housewives (or unemployed or students). The pattern for nonsmokers is parallel (37% are employed; 63% are housewives). Look, however, at the incidence of heavy smoking -- and the myth about cigarettes and working women is refuted. Among housewives who smoke, 66% are heavy smokers; among working women, 53% are heavy smokers. Interestingly it is also the working women who afford the best opportunity for converting smokers into nonsmokers, accentuating the desirability of antismoking campaigns directed at the workplace.

The myth about the Women's Liberation movement encouraging cigarette smoking is also not substantiated by the findings of the study for equal numbers of young women smokers (70%) and nonsmokers (69%) identify strongly or partially with the Women's Liberation movement.

Smoking and Pregnancy:

A critical period to reach young women smokers is not only during pregnancy but in the months after the woman has given birth. A majority of young women smokers (62%) believe that smoking can harm the fetus. Even more important, during

pregnancy, 67% of the smokers have either cut back (32%) or stopped smoking (35%). Unfortunately, however, the abstinence does not hold up -- for here they are back smoking once again.

Smoking and Children:

Several years ago, when antismoking commericals were far more widely available on television, young children were reported to be among the main crusaders against their mother's smoking habits. Today, over half of the young women smokers with children (56%) report that their children are bothered by their smoking -- but there is little evidence that the children are as militant in their efforts as in the past. Among former smokers, for example, very few mention that their children were a major influence in getting them to quit.

The Former Smokers:

While progress has been made in getting some young women to quit smoking -- the main success has been among the light rather than the committed smoker. Among the young women, 13% report that they have quit smoking. Most of

these former smokers (63%) smoked less than a pack a day. There are, however, important lessons to be learned from the former young women smokers:

> One out of two used willpower rather than substitutes such as candy or gum; almost none of this age group of young women smokers reported that they gained weight; and most found immediate gratification from quitting. The feeling of being in control of one's life, an improved sense of physical wellbeing, the end of cigarette bad breath and smell, and money saved proved to be stronger reinforcements than even the insurance they are buying against future disease and ill health.

The Potential for Quitting:

A careful analysis of the data suggests that there is a huge potential for getting both teen-age girl and young women smokers to quit. Applying a scale made up of five items, 70% of the young women smokers and 58% of the teen-age girl smokers qualified as "potentials for quitting".*

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* See Section XIV for a description of scale items.

Among the young women, the potential quitters in comparison with the "committed smokers" are younger, more interested in sports and physical exercise, more active in clubs, especially the PTA, and more likely to be employed. Over half of them are smoking a pack or more of cigarettes a day. Among the potential quitters in the teen-age girls group, there is a particular interest in physical exercise, jogging, tennis, golf and team sports. They think of themselves being more popular than most and leaders. They are active in clubs and organizations inside and outside of the schools. Quitting is on the minds of most young teen-age girls and young women smokers. Six out of ten current teen-age girl smokers (59%) have tried to quit smoking in the recent past; 72% of the women have made similar efforts. The desire is there; but not the will. Undermining this desire is the belief that:

.... Smoking is addictive

.... Once you start you can't stop

.... Air pollution is even more likely than cigarettes to give you cancer.

Antismoking efforts have never communicated that cigarettes are addictive -- but clearly not enough stress has been placed on their nonaddictive qualities. Today's teen-age girls and young women need to be sold on the fact that:

.... There is immediate gratification in not smoking; independence; self-control; and expression of their own values; physical well-being and attractiveness, as well as insurance for future health.

.... Nonsmokers are in the majority and have a right to be militant about other peoples' smoking.

... Smoking is not addictive - but that there are other far more powerful reasons for not smoking.